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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004242

SIPDIS

CENTCOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/15/2015

TAGS: IZ PGOV PNAT

SUBJECT: FIRST REACTIONS TO REFERENDUM: SHIA CONFIDENCE,
SUNNI ARABS REFLECTIVE

Classified By: (U) POLCOUNS ROBERT S. FORD, REASON 1.4 (D)

11. (C) Summary: So far, the UN election advisory team has not heard of significant irregularities during the voting operation on October 15. In contrast to the January 2005 election, this time our Assyrian Christian contacts in Baghdad so far are not complaining of serious problems with the voting in the North. The UN advisory team team chief told us late October 15 that the Sunni Arab vote was up significantly, while the Kurdish vote appears to be less than it was in January 2005. The Shia Islamist camp is confident that the draft constitution has passed in the referendum. Our quick survey of some Sunni Arab contacts showed they are more reflective, but in agreement that voting was the right thing to do. We will be attentive to allegations of irregularities even as interest shifts from the voting to the vote count, especially the counts in Ninewah and Salah ad-Din.

UN ADVISOR REVIEWS TURNOUT AND PROBLEMS

12. (C) In an evening meeting with Poloffs, UN EAD chief Carina Perelli confided that preliminary indications are that Kurdish participation in Erbil and Sulimaniyah had been lower than in January. Sunni Arab participation in Anbar and Salah ad-Din had been higher and Shia participation in the South and South-Central had been about the same. She added that participation in Mosul appeared to have been higher than in January, attributing the increase to Sunni Arab voters.

13. (C) Perelli shared with Poloffs a list of alleged irregularities or other incidents adversely affecting voting operations that had been reported to the Independent Election Commission of Iraq (IECI). While she noted that the list could still grow, as of 20:30 local time it contained only 26 reported incidents. Many of these had been investigated and dismissed as lacking foundation. Others included a fire set at a school used as a polling center in Ramadi and a hostage situation involving polling staff at a different center in Ramadi. Perelli stressed that the background to the hostage incident appeared to be a tribal, not insurgency-related, matter.

Assyrian Christians: Better than January, So Far

14. (C) William Warda, the spokesman for the Assyrian Democratic Movement, told PolCouns late October 15 that in contrast to the January 2005 election, he had heard of no serious problems in northern Iraq during the referendum. He cautioned that he still had only sketchy information from the North because of poor communications with their offices. The voting in places like Mosul, Barthalla and Basheqa went far better. It would be important now to be sure the vote count was proper, he noted. He said that his sources in Ninewah were saying that the vote counts in polling stations where the Assyrians had sources indicated the draft constitution was losing. Warda said he did not know by what margin it was losing.

Confidence in the Shia Islamist Camp

15. (C) A top aide to Constitution Committee Chairman and Shia Islamist Humam al-Hamudi was in a festive mood when Poloff spoke with him during the evening of 15 October. He said he expected the constitution would pass smoothly but admitted that he had no "real statistics" to back that up. He dismissed concerns about Salah al-Din,

saying the Shia voters in the province would prevent any no vote from reaching two-thirds. He also dismissed concerns about Nineveh predicting with assurance that "The Kurds will not let that province vote no!"

Initial Sunni Reactions: Voting is Important

16. (C) Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) spokesman Ayed Samarrai'e told PolCouns midday October 15 that he thought the vote was proceeding smoothly. He had no major complaints, including from IIP observers watching polling operations. Samarrai'e noted that the IIP decision to change its position to support of the constitution had caused some dissension within the IIP. Nonetheless, he thought its base would come around. He said the director of Baghdad TV, affiliated with the IIP, had told him early October 15 that phone calls to the station had switched from sharply critical of the IIP decision to supportive. Samarrai'e would not hazard a guess on the outcome in Nineveh or Salah ad-Din, however.

17. (C) Iraqi Council for National Dialogue (ICND) member Sa'adoon al-Zubaidi warned Poloff October 15 that if the constitution passed by a large margin, the Sunni population will claim fraud and ballot stuffing by the Shia and Kurds. He thought a narrow win would be more credible. He also said he was frustrated with the lack of time available for Iraqis to obtain and understand the constitution. Poloff reminded him the Iraqi newspapers could have printed it, and the protracted negotiations of which Zubaidi was a part delayed printing and distribution of the text. Zubaidi didn't argue.

18. (C) Hatem al-Mukhlis, Editor of Al Watan newspaper and Tikrit native, told PolOff on October 15 that he didn't like the constitution very much but he had urged people to vote in the referendum. He was upset by reports today of Sunni clerics in Baghdad's Adhamiya neighborhood allegedly telling people to boycott the vote. This same "nonsense" in January caused the political troubles of today, he commented.

COMMENT

19. (C) We will be attentive to allegations of irregularities during the voting even as everyone's attention shifts to the vote count. Calls from journalists and our political contacts suggests that most people are watching with greatest interest the outcome in Nineveh and Salah ad-Din to determine if the draft constitution passed. Khalilzad